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"THE YOUNG DUKE"
By W. Q. Orchardson, R. A.

Current Art Topics

By "MAHLSTICK," London Correspondent

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JUST to note the ebb, or the flow, of Modernity in Art, I looked in lately at the exhibition of "The International Society of Painters, Gravers and Sculptors" at the Neo-Grosvenor Galleries in Bond Street. It must be now well into the second decade, since this Association burst upon the world, with such a flare and a blaze of trumpets, journalistic, as might well presage, as some thought it did, the passing of the Old, and the Advent of a "New Heaven and a new Earth"—for things artistic. The list of presidents, vice-presidents and members honorary and active, comprised all the very latest and up-to-date deities of the painters and sculptors' "Olympus"—Whistler and Rodin, Monet and Zorn, Manet and Bocklin, etc., headed a procession of lesser lights—the Van Goghs, the Gauguins, the Picassos had not yet arrived. It held its first exhibition at Knightsbridge in a huge barn of a room, originally a skating rink, and we all went to

see the show. The "New-English" had already come, but still this sort of thing was not yet common; we had not strayed very far or often from the beaten track of the Royal Academy, the two Water-Color Societies and the Grosvenor Gallery of "Patience." I am not going to deny that it was a most interesting and delightful exhibition, catholic and representative of all that was best in the more advanced art of our day. Charles John Collins scored a distinct success there, but exhibited only once after, and if it could have maintained anything like the same level it would certainly have become the premier exhibition. But the Continental painters who so largely contributed to its success could not be expected to continue sending their best work to an alien exhibition, and so, year by year, the standard deteriorated, at the same time that it became the hunting ground of the extremist and the charlatan out for notoriety

at all costs, till at the present time it does hardly more than fill the gap in places of amusement left vacant by the defunct Post Impressionist Shows and their congeners. If one is sufficiently tolerant and complaisant, one may spend an amusing hour here, on a dull day, and with luck be rewarded by discovering in odd corners, some quite interesting things. The first impression of the ensemble of the walls is painfully jumpy; what indeed has become of the vogue for that unison of exhibition effect which was supposed, at one time, to be the hall-mark of all good Continental Art and of the most advanced English, though we were assured, painfully lacking in the normal Academic British. But here in spite of the very subdued lighting of the room, these pictures just jump at each others throats—and the spectators. This internecine strife somehow recalls the traveling menageries of our youth, where the beasts seemed mainly occupied in growling, roaring and squealing one against the other; here the canvasses seem to strain out from their frames, in their endeavor to outvie each other in ugliness—hideous but happy if only thereby our notice is attracted. One does come across, of course, some talent and sanity, even though it may be somewhat riskily experimental. The brilliant sunlight of Lamorna Birch's two contributions may be worth the elimination of local color and detail by which he attains it, but I doubt if I could live comfortably with them. Oliver Hall has a fine low-toned thing, in his recognized decorative convention, which is yet close to nature: there is a Charles Shannon, good, but monotonously similar to his R. A. works, and Nicholson's large canvas of earthenware and glass pots, is a senseless waste of skill; but these are among the redeeming features. Words fail me to describe the Bedlamite work of Frances Hodgkins or Akon de Smet, the unpleasant nude dummies of A. J. Hynes, the huge canvas centering the second room, painted by I don't know whom, and depicting I don't know what. It would really seem as if it were the ambition of some of these creatures to show how perfectly loathsome a thing color can be. They revel in the foulest shades of liver color or of



"TROUBLE"

By W. Q. Orchardson, R. A.

—Collection of James Ogston, Esq., Aberdeen
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purplish tones combined with slimy greens like decomposing flesh. It used to be an accepted axiom among painters that a tendency to purple showed either a faulty eye for color, or was a sign of old age and declining powers. Sir Edwin Landseer's later work was often quoted as an example of senile tendency to purplish tints, and in this connection Dr. Hyslop, the great mind specialist, maintains that all this freakishness in art is evidence of mental abnormality. In this exhibition there are quite a score of canvases which can certainly only be explained on the supposition that they are the work of unbalanced minds.

One of the least hopeful symptoms of our time, is the increasing imitative tendency, among the extremists especially. It was no easy matter in days gone by, to imitate Sir Joshua or Gainsborough, or Constable or Turner or Millais or Rossetti, it could not be done by an enthusiast who had never handled a brush before, anxious to see what painting pictures was like, and with a wet afternoon on his hands; but few of our "Modern Mas-

ters" need cause him any misgivings, the man, woman or child who could not paint at a first attempt, one or two Manets that I have seen publicly exhibited, any of the Walter Sickerts, not a few of Augustus John's and most of the Post Impressionists, need never hope to paint anything; but indeed Mr. Roger Fry glories in this very fact, saying that "ostentation of skill is more fatal than 'downright incapacity.'"

But even in the more serious fields of art this tendency to follow a bell-wether is noticeable. Orpen last year scored a great success with a somewhat novel device in his portraits, of posing his sitters in two lights of different tones and values, and he obtained very beautiful and striking results. Consequently this year the exhibitions are full of second-hand and second-rate "Orpens" by clever men. Surely painters like Richard Jack and Amsschits are quite strong and original enough in their native talent, and only lower their status by thus following in the wake of anyone else.

Truly the ways of the twentieth century art critic are, as the Hebrew Sage says writing of old of "the ways of a Man with a Maid"—"wonderful." That distinguished member of the critic tribe, Mr. Konody, from his rostrum in the columns of the London "Observer," lately chose for his text the famous work of the late W. Q. Orchardson, "The Young Duke," which is being exhibited at the Galleries in the Haymarket of Messrs. McClean. In quite appropriate and appreciative terms he descanted on the beauties and merits of that supreme example of Victorian Art. But as we read his flowing phrases it was impossible not to remember with a corresponding discounting of them, the unstinted eulogy this writer has always kept in stock for the minauderies of the "isms." For instance, few of us who saw it will forget readily that monstrosity of Augustus John's displayed some years ago at the exhibition of the New English Art Club in the Suffolk Street Rooms, which he dubbed "The Mumpers." In its deliberately childish composition, its affected distortion of the human figure and countenance, its acid, acrid color and its disgusting smeary paint, it constituted in its impudent dimensions

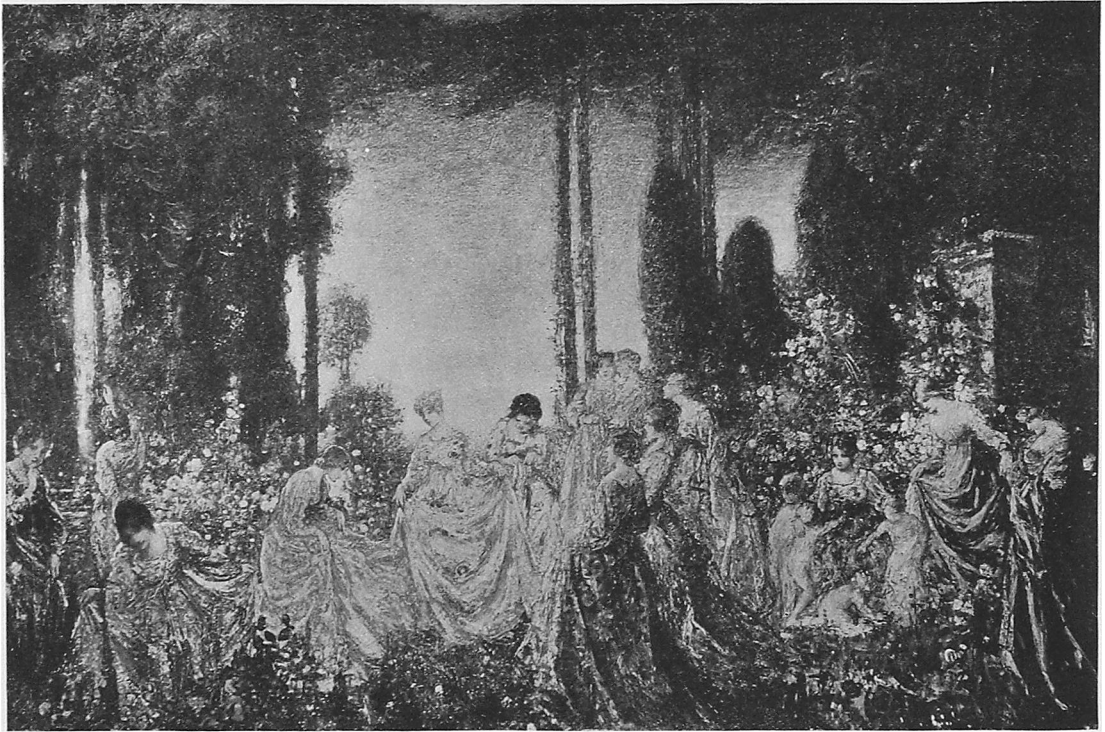
of about 20 feet longitudinally, perhaps the most insolent flout ever flung in the face of the public and the artistic world. Yet Mr. Konody fairly fell over himself in his endeavor to find words to express his admiration of this new "revelation." No man can serve two masters. He who comes straight from burning incense in the charnel-temple of the art of "The Mumpers" to sing the praises of the art of "The Young Duke" belies his own soul one way or the other. Let us charitably hope that Mr. Konody's alliance with the Powers of Evil is only a matter of policy, and not conviction. I always have considered "The Young Duke" to be about the high-water mark, not only of the work of the painter but of that phase or branch of art known as historic "genre." The literary motive of the picture is so delicately woven into the pictorial scheme that it is never felt apart from it, and yet unsurpassable as is the picture from the standpoint of craftsmanship, the artist, who one feels, after the first inception of the idea, was concerned solely with the pictorial problems of his task, has succeeded in conveying a literary dramatic impression, which remains undimmed after years. I have not seen the picture for a long time, yet nothing in literature, not even the perfect art of Thackeray, impresses my mind with such a vivid sense of the romance, the beauty—and the decadence—of that old world, so soon to be swept into the abyss in the tornado of the French Revolution. These young men arrayed in a fashion which for sheer beauty of male attire has never been equaled, toast with acclamation not devoid of sycophancy—though themselves nobles—their host, who, young, handsome, exquisitely complete from peruke to shoe-buckle, has in this his first youth, already emptied life's chalice, and now with insufferable sufferance, accepts or tolerates the homage of his companions—for in such world there could be no friends. In the gloom beyond the glitter of the dinner table, one may almost glimpse the first glint of the flames which were so soon to engulf these and their day forever. Art such as this, which in addition to the perfection of the qualities native to its proper self, of technique composi-

tion of color and line and mass, can raise the soul to such planes of thought and imagination, is worthy of the place it holds in the estimation of mankind and of the lifelong effort of the greatest amongst us, but not when we hear that its function is to reduce us to the mental status, outlook and craftsmanship of a child, a savage, a degenerate. It is often interesting and suggestive to know how far an artist's work is related to his environment and how much it may be indebted to it. Now with a few exceptions, like "Napoleon on the Bellerophon," Orchardson's subjects, whether illustrating and illuminating the history and story of the eighteenth century, or that of his own day, as in the "Maraige de Convenience" were set in just variations of the same *mise-en-scène*. This, as is well known, he found in his studio in his house, No. 13 Portland Place, not a stone's throw from the Langham Hotel. In this beautiful room receding down its length from its one great window past the marble columns and pilasters into the soft glooms of the furthest portion, he visualized the salons of the Ancient Regime and of the Empire, and reincarnated on his canvases the famous men and women with whose wit and wisdom, epigram and laughter, their walls once resounded. Many of my readers can recall to mind picture after picture when the background is the ever recurring lofty gloom of the beyond, just defined by the gleams of light on the pillars or on the priceless cabinets or bureaus which stood about. The yellowish greenish color tone so persistent in his work, yet never tiresome, also characterized the room, so that he lived in that atmosphere through which he recalled the past or viewed the present and thereby somehow conveyed the impression that both alike were visioned rather than actualized only however, to make their message more convincing and appealing. This same limitation of variety, in the settings of his pictures, obtained even in his pictures, obtained even in his models, resulting in that repetition of the same facial type with which they have been at times reproached. For years, for all but his very young characters, he confined himself to a well known model and character, Charles Peat,

whose thin figure and high-pitched somewhat quaint features can be described as the physical substructure of numberless Georgian gentlemen or French Grandees. He posed for the writer within a few days of his death. He was a very intelligent and helpful model, with only one fault, a tendency to be garrulous about the better days of some dim past, his rich but unappreciative relations, and his long connections with Orchardson.

Reverting to the environment of an artist and his work, I was told of a curious instance of a painter's love of his painting grounds. "Jimmy" Grace was, a generation or more ago, one of the most prominent and popular figures in that vaguely defined world of painters, musicians, dramatists and journalists, dubbed heaven only knows why "Bohemia." His singing of his own composition, "The twelve Apostles in a row," in a curious drawling, nasal, recitative sort of sing-song voice was inimitable and the most perfect thing of its kind of its day on the stage or off it; one literally never tired of it. Some of my less juvenile readers may indeed have heard him in the seventies in the old Hogarth Club, in Fitzroy Square. But he was also a very distinguished and successful landscape painter. He lived and worked for the greater part of his life at a beautiful spot in Surrey known as Royal Common close to Hindhead, and his devotion to the place begot in him an odd sense of proprietorship, so that, it is said, he would order off in the style of the manorial magnate, any unfortunate wight whom he found sketching there. This may be just a tale, but it is rather touching to hear that in his will he gave instructions which were duly carried out, that after cremation his ashes were to be taken down to Royal Common and scattered amongst the birch-trees, the broom and the heather which he loved and painted so devotedly all his days.

London is to be deprived again this year of its annual strawberry saturnalia, politely referred to generally as the "Conversazione of the Royal Academy." The authorities object to the lighting of such great glass roof areas, in view of possible air-raids, so the Teuton has succeeded in "strafing" us to that extent.



THE GOLDEN ISLAND
By Tom Mostyn

AS individualism grew more and more accentuated in Modern Art, and found expression in theories as to the purpose and practice of painting, more or less opposed to those which had hitherto prevailed and which were crystallized in the traditions and ideals ruling the exhibitions of the various societies and academies, the "one man" show became a necessity, if the new notions were to get a hearing from the world at large. It might be well interesting to sidetrack into the subject of picture exhibitions generally to inquire how, when and where they first took shape as we know them; they can scarcely have antedated the formation of the various academies and these are for the most part of the middle and late eighteenth century, though Paris claims an Academy of Painting 1391, and of Fine Arts 1648, and Rome, one of Painting 1665. The London Academy formally dates from 1768, but may in reality claim an earlier period. I am not familiar with any reference in history to exhibitions previous to the London shows at Adelphi Ter-

race, and certainly none of the old masters or their biographers reckoned the milestones of their careers, by exhibitions, annual or otherwise. However, come they did, and automatically for over a century ruled and regulated the course of art. One of the first to revolt was the ill-starred and erratic Benjamin Haydon, who exhibited one of his gigantic "classic" canvases in some hall or the other, and records in his diary his rage and chagrin, that while the public flocked to some freak show next door, hardly a soul came to see his *chef d'oeuvre*.

But the man who really inaugurated the "one man" show as we know it was the pre-Raphaelite painter, Ford Madox Brown. I possess, but unfortunately have mislaid, the catalogue of one of these exhibitions, or I might have quoted from its pages some of the curiously naive descriptions or explanation of the artist's purpose and intention in the works. As I have previously pointed out, Madox Brown, Rosetti and their comrades knew, or at least cared nothing about the

dogma of "Art for Art's sake," or that a picture should tell its own story, or following a still higher counsel of perfection, have no story to tell. These exhibitions of Brown's by a generation which regarded the Royal Academy as one of the cornerstones of the British constitution, like the "Establishment," "The Times" or the "Derby," were viewed rather askance, as something in the nature of a risky innovation arguing on the part of the innovator not merely an overweening sense of his own importance but a dangerous disregard for authority. Innovations, however, like other evils, frequently show a tendency to develop and spread, and it was so in this instance, but not really till the seventies and eighties did the fashion become so popular that Saturday at the Bond Street Private Views came to be a recognized society and social function, which flourished a main till the deadly week-end habit reinforced by the advent of the automobile arose, and Bond Street on Saturday afternoon again became a desert tenanted by cats and caretakers. But the advantages of these exhibitions apparently are still sufficient to induce artists and dealers to continue to hold them under the changed conditions. Indeed, phenomenal success of such men as Arthur Rackham at the Leicester galleries, of Charles John Collings at the Carroll galleries, or N. H. J. Baird and Robert Meyerheim at the same, proves that the practice is justified by its results. Mr. Tom Mostyn's large and important show at the handsome, spacious Grafton galleries was perhaps the most serious private exhibition of the season, in regard to the number and the size of the works shown. Mr. Mostyn's work is very abruptly divided into two categories, one realistic, photographically matter-of-fact, as in his portraits, the other as in the works shown here—dreamy, fantastical, imaginative—in the first case the color is extremely sober, in the latter the painter revels, almost riots, in the fullest possible gamut of his palette. One has no difficulty in deciding in which section of his work the painter's heart lies. Occasionally we find the two combined, as in the beautiful picture "The Child," where the highly modeled heads of the figures contrast

so charmingly with the vigorous suggestion of flowers and foliage of the background. I think his large canvas in this year's academy would have greatly gained if the figures had been carried much further. In this picture the color scheme is an arrangement in gold and crimson, but it looked, to my mind, somewhat overmuch. I prefer his work when the color is tuned to a lower key. At times the technique, a patinated impasto, is reminiscent of the somewhat mannered convention affected by Hornel, but as in the case of his exemplar, the effect is very agreeable. Another frequent feature in his compositions, and one very popular at the moment, is the use of columns—or of trees giving the same spectacular effect—running out of the pictures. It is really a device borrowed from the stage and the scene-painters' repertoire, and in a somewhat theatrical way it imparts an air of romance, and gives it so easily that it has become somewhat cheap and tiresome. The late Edwin Abbey was one of the first to discover the pictorial and sentimental value of columns towering up across the canvas, and the notion has been since much exploited by the younger men like Nicholson, Pryde and others. A twin device also is to have curtains of the size of the mainsail of a three-decker drooping down in Brobdingagian folds from some region above the line of vision to which in their turn the columns seem ever aspiring to attain. The whole thing is a convention just as much as the admirable but long-discredited one of a church-tower against an evening sky; but there is, as a rule, an affectation of superior style and of "classiness" about these later ones from which the earlier were free.

I intended to refer last month to the death of James Sant, R. A., recently, in his ninety-seventh year. To few mortals is such a life vouchsafed—well over fourscore working years—in this year's exhibition was hung his portrait from his own hand—dated 1916. Nothing could surpass its sensitive rendering of the pathos of extreme old age. It was palpably the work of eyes that were dimming, yet saw true, and hands that trembled, but had not lost their cunning. It might worthily hang with the infinitely beautiful and pathetic



THE CHILD
By Tom Mostyn

visions of himself in the winter of his days by Rembrandt. Sant must surely have been the last of that galaxy of talented men in art, literature, music, science and the drama who gave lustre to the Victorian era. His working life must have been practically coincident with its beginning, yet it continued down that long vista of years and out into a new age and new world where those vanished years have become history, and to all seeming that long voyage was across calm and sunny sea, unlike poor Rembrandt, whose earthy journey ended in gloom, poverty and sadness. The friend and associate of royalty, a portrait of a lady known to the writer—the Baroness Deichmann—gained him the distinction of painter-in-chief to Queen Victoria—his life was one long drawn professional and social success. When the good fairies do come to the christening of a painter they certainly come full-handed; witness Titian, Van-

dyke, Velasquez, Millais, Landseer, Meissonnier, Menzel, etc., etc. Sant's most popular picture, reproduced all over the world—"The Soul's Awakening"—was painted when he had long o'er-passed the Psalmist's allotted span of threescore and ten. In sad contrast to such a fate is the recent tragic death of Cyrus Cuneo at the very threshold of his career. Like Whistler, Boughton, Sargent and many other painters of distinction, he hailed from the new world, having been born in San Francisco some thirty-odd years ago. He early set out to seek his fortune and worked his way to Paris, where he studied under Whistler and Giradot, maintaining himself in part by giving lessons in boxing. This showed the native hue and resolution of the man, or indeed boy. He then came to London, the Mecca of all artists who speak the Anglo-Saxon tongue, and quickly made his way to the top as an illustrator, both in black and

white and in color, his work being equally in demand by book publishers as by magazine editors. He married and settled down in London to do his life's work, of which the goal was painting; illustrating was but a stepping-stone. His eye for color, his free, unhesitating and masterly brushwork, and his trained and practiced capacity for arrangement and composition justified the highest hopes and ambitions on his own part and that of his friends. He was readily elected to various societies, the academy was regularly placing his work on the line, when a slight scratch received at a friend's studio set up blood poisoning, and a personality which radiated energy and vitality went out in a moment, and the world of art and his friends are sadly the poorer. Not tall, yet of splendid physique, his head more closely resembled that of Napoleon in his prime than any I have ever known.

The war has been in every possible aspect a long series of happenings of the unexpected, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. The Artistic Body quite expected to have to retire from the stage during the continuance of war's alarms and perhaps for long afterwards. The painters quite anticipated the relegation of palette and brushes to some vague hereafter hoped for rather than seen beyond the smoke of battle. Pictures were to be seen listed among the things not wanted by a World in Arms. Yet these dismal but natural prognostications have proved untrue.

After the first shock was over, life began to pulsate again in the studios, the Societies began to hold their exhibitions as usual, rumors of sales began to be bruited about, till during the last year we have been painting, exhibiting and selling as if Armageddon was part of the normal scheme of things. Even in beleaguered, famine-stricken Germany, we read of a collection of pictures fetching £50,000 under the hammer. On the other hand, amid all their early forebodings, the marine and the landscape painters never foresaw that over the greater part of the country-side amid the whole of the seaside, out-door sketching and painting would be forbidden. Numerous are the stories of stormy interviews with rural Dogberrys and Shallows—of confiscated cameras and sketches and threats of the village lock-up. A friend of the writer, though himself a Special Constable Inspector and a Magistrate, was hauled up before the Justices of a neighboring town: Luckily for him he was known to one of them or he might easily have spent the night in the seclusion of the County Gaol.

As I have frequently mentioned, the artists have distinguished themselves in many ways in these war days. The Artist Corps, by the testimony of Lord Kitchener, standing practically at the head of the New Armies, and it was interesting to hear that in the more delicate operations of the Machine Shop their trained eyes and hands stood them in such good stead as to gain them actually first place.



THE GARDEN OF DESOLATION
By Tom Mostyn